

Open Letter to Church Board

Date: June 21, 2015

To: Church Board:

Jimmye Saldivar, Chairman
Don Whitley, Secretary
Dorene Drake, Finance Secretary
Barb Scantlin, Elder Chair
Ruth Conover, Evangelism
CWF, Fellowship
Pat Whitley, Service
Larry Scruggs, Worship

_____, V. Chair
Katie Spencer, Treasurer
_____, Education
Pat Whitley, Deacons
Barb Scantlin, Facilities
Elizabeth Zalazar, Membership
Mike Powers, Stewardship

Oaks Christian Church
1216 Bethlehem St
Houston, Texas 77018-19

From: Charlie Dean, church member

No Strategy To Address The Membership Problem

I am concerned that OCC has no real strategy for attracting **Young Adults**. I believe some or most of our leaders have purposefully failed to attract young adults. **So far, any strategy—assuming there is one—for attracting young adults seems to be based on an implied myth.** This myth is that young adults want to accept the roll of showing up, shutting up, having a snowball's chance of being on the Board until they are almost senior citizens, not being able to access church records in a reasonable way, singing un-motivating song-music, donating their time in menial ways, and giving their money under false pretenses.

The only reasonable explanation for Young Adults missing at OCC is that they feel or perceive a lack of control over decision-making, a lack of emotional connection to the supposed purpose of OCC, that others see them as being qualified only for busy work or menial work, and that others see them only as commodities for the budget.

Membership is our greatest asset. Our present predicament is not reasonably sustainable. I wonder how long we can continue to lose members (or attendees) through attrition at our present rate, while not attracting new members. I suppose we could have a few major benefactors who could bankroll the status quo, but that would not accomplish the constitutional purpose of OCC.

Demographics of the Membership

During the service on Sunday **May 31, 2015** Pastor Don alluded to the demographic make up of churches and how people resist changes. He did not specifically mention

OCC, any particular situation, or any particular people. I do not think he was alluding to a church in Canada, France, or Guatemala. I noticed that the congregation became very quite for a couple of minutes.

It seems to me that most of the leaders of OCC have avoided having any church activity that would or could bring in a different racially demographic group. As a relatively new member, I do not feel it is my responsibility to intentionally change OCC's demographic makeup. If a change happens without my "push," I am OK with it.

We cannot ride on the ideologies of the 1950s and 1960s as some members have done for decades. In today's social climate, I do not see how OCC can avoid a change to its demographics—if its leaders really want new members. It would be very difficult in 2015 to have a church composed of Caucasians—or those who could "pass"—especially in Houston. No member of this church has ever told me directly that he wants this kind of church. However, actions speak for themselves. Appealing to a fuller demographic, both racially and economically, is probably critical to resolving the membership matter.

On Sunday **June 7, 2015** Pastor Don alluded to being brave enough to vote based on your conscience, and against your constituents. There was a board meeting after church. Just a coincidence perhaps.

Church Related Activities

OCC boasts numerous activities: Christian Women's Fellowship, Sunday school classes, Community Lunch, Handbell Choir, Choir, Bible Study, Prayer Circle, Helping at MANNA, Lunches in Kirshner Hall, men's activities, or other activities. It seems to me that every activity is subtly structured to avoid changing OCC's demographics. Consequently, all the activities are designed NOT to attract young adults.

OCC alleges online "there is a responsibility to become an active member of the body of Christ." OCC suggests that to accomplish this, there is no "better way to do that than to become involved in the church activities of " OCC where "there are many opportunities for involvement." Viewed from almost any angle, the results are a failure. Presently the system contradicts OCC's mission statement or its stated purpose in the Bylaws. In spite of all of our busywork, we do not attract young adults.

Suggestions Trashed By Church Leaders

On Sunday, **February 8, 2015** during Sunday school I suggested that we invite young adults from other churches to our luncheon. One member responded, "What we need is members." Such a comment side-steps and negates the suggestion without addressing its merit. A second member chimed in with another objection that avoided addressing any merit of the suggestion.

Young adults need an excuse, or an invitation, to visit with us. Perhaps this could be achieved by having an event that is not a regular worship service, i.e., OCC's birthday, overalls and hat day, country and western fiddle music day, steel guitar music day, etc.



On Sunday, **June 8, 2015** I suggested that we have joint activities with other Disciples of Christ Churches, such as having lunch together. Again, **the same two leaders** voiced opposition without having addressed the merits. These two leaders always voice opposition to any suggestion of inter-church activity or any joint activity with

any group that might attract young adults. The basis of the opposition is always trivial and irrelevant. Objections include: Oh we can't do that; Preachers would not like it; People disagree on what a church should be like; Preachers would not want to do that.

These two church leaders hijack any narrative that might lead to something productive. They are knowingly keeping people away from OCC. They have the remorse of a rock. This has happened repeatedly. Perhaps they secretly want OCC to fail. Older people can participate futuristically, or they can be an impediment as long as possible. Older people dominate the leadership at OCC, and it is easy—perhaps too easy—to form cliques, and perpetuate the status quo, and reminisce about the 1950s and 1960s. There must be more than a platitude or mere affirmation of having new young adult members. For years, with its music and church activities, OCC has repelled more people than it has attracted. We cannot simply wish new members into existence. We must attract them.

Ideologies Based On Ignorance

Statements by some church leaders could affect membership and attendance. From time to time I hear some of our church leaders claiming the following:

- We have taken God out of our schools.
- We have taken God out of our country and this is the cause of our problems.
- We have taken God out of our courthouses.
- We have lost some sort of religious freedom.
- This country was founded on Christianity.
- This country is or was a Christian country.
- This country was founded on Christianity.

The same three leaders continue to engage in this. There is a difference between justified belief and wishful thinking. Simply repeating something does not make it true. We need to deal with facts as they are, not as some of us wish they were. Do we really want to wish certain groups of people into second-class citizens? Religious freedom involves one's ability to worship; it also involves not having the government promote one religion over another. In the OCC Bylaws the letter group "**educat**" appears eleven times; this ought to speak for itself.



Everyone at OCC (as far as I know) says we need more young adults. Surely we want young adults who are educated, open-minded, intelligent, knowledgeable, and have good decision-making skills—not the most ignorant and gullible. If visitors (potential members) feel that they are expected to adopt an ideology grounded in ignorance and arrogances, they will be less likely to become members. This can quickly produce an anchoring effect or a psychological bias against returning to OCC.

2010 Document From U.S. Census Bureau

If the demographics of OCC were to mimic the demographics of Houston, part of our membership would be as follows:

28.68 % would be 19 years of age and below.
 33.28% would be from 20 to 39.
 24.75 % would be from 40 to 59.
 13.30 % would be 60 and older.

2010 Age and Sex City of Houston



PLANNING &
DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT

Source: 2010 PL94-171 Data, US Census Bureau

Date: October 17, 2012

Description	City of Houston
Total Population:	2,099,451
All Ages	
Under 5 years	171,026
5 to 9 years	151,041
10 to 14 years	137,307
15 to 19 years	142,544
20 to 24 years	171,086
25 to 29 years	199,906
30 to 34 years	174,079
35 to 39 years	153,662
40 to 44 years	137,556
45 to 49 years	136,112
50 to 54 years	132,549
55 to 59 years	113,365
60 to 64 years	89,276
65 to 69 years	62,299
70 to 74 years	44,011
75 to 79 years	34,269
80 to 84 years	25,988
85 years and over	23,375

www.houstontx.gov/planning/Demographics/docs_pdfs/Cy/coh_age_sex.pdf

Our Pastor

Thanks to Pastor Don's ingenuity, we have two additional income streams as a result of being a landlord with the church property. It appears that this additional income makes OCC economically sustainable.

I wonder how long any pastor can be expected to remain at a church where the decision-makers use their positions and clout to see that nothing is accomplished that would draw in new members. Perhaps some pastors would "hang around" and simply treat the situation as a means to a steady income. Others might not.

Church leaders have spent decades fostering this problem

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